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ABSTRACT

The Ideal Student Description Q-Sort was developed originally as a predictive instrument to determine probable success rates as teachers based upon the teacher candidate's perceptions of students in general. The Q-Sort consists of 84 items describing "openness" and "closedness" in a student and reveals the extent to which a teacher perceives students as either flexible (positive) or rigid (negative) in their interpersonal relationships, and also suggests whether the teacher is more open in his/her perceptions of students. Results of administering the Q-Sort over a four-year period indicated that participants in secondary education programs had a more negative perception of students at the outset, remained more rigid in their views, and tended to become increasingly negative over the four-year period and into their first year of teaching. The opposite was found true for students in the elementary education programs. It became apparent to the investigator that measuring student characteristics for screening purposes at a definite point in time was contrary to the concept of developmental teaching and learning, and that perceptions can be changed over a period of time provided sequences of learning activities are made available (even though secondary teaching candidates are more inflexible). The ISD Q-Sort, instead of becoming a screening device, may evolve into a counseling instrument used in planning the sequence of interpersonal relationships in teacher education indicated by the candidate's individual needs. (MB)

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TEACHER EDUCATION CANDIDATES' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS

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One of the major problems facing teacher education programs at the undergraduate level is selecting those candidates for the teacher education program who will have the greatest probability of success. This problem is further compounded by the lack of agreement among educators as to the criteria of effective teaching. Fattu (5) reports that research over the past few decades has given little indication of ways to measure teacher effectiveness.

Nevertheless, in the absence of valid criteria for describing or measuring teacher effectiveness, teacher training institutions are often required to adopt "specific requirements for participation in the program." (8). They must also develop a rationale to support these requirements.

Many institutions use traditional criteria as guides in admitting students to their program -- e.g. minimum grade point average, college personnel recommendations, and personal attributes. A review of the literature with regard to predicting teacher effectiveness seems to indicate that although certain criteria may eliminate poor risks, there is little

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in the way of positive criteria suggested for selecting potentially effective teachers.

Recent studies of teachers' perceptions suggest some factors that possibly should be considered in the process of selecting candidates for admittance to the teacher education program. Combs and Soper (4)(8) suggest that knowing subject matter is not enough to qualify a candidate for admittance, since both "good" and "poor" teachers can describe characteristics of a good helping relationship. Whetstone (9) found there to be significant differences between effective counselors and effective teachers in the way they each perceived students. Furthermore, Freeze (6) and Bills (2) discovered that a direct relationship exists between the openness of a teacher to his experience and the quality of the helping relationship established. Combs (3) indicates that a teacher's perceptions of his students has a direct effect on the teacher's regard for them. Bills (2) presents some evidence that would suggest that the openness of a teacher as defined by Rogers (7) and judged by his administrative officers, determines his teaching success. It is therefore quite apparent that there is a need to investigate the perceptions of teacher education candidates to determine their importance in predicting success in teacher education and subsequent teaching assignments.

This study attempts to discover possible relationships that may exist between candidates' perceptions of students in general and subsequent performance in student teaching and the first year of full time teaching. Changes in perceptions of these candidates will also be analyzed with regard to certain experiences related to the teacher education program.

As eighty-four item Q-Sort was constructed using hundreds of student descriptions. Half of the descriptions were rated independently by three judges to be characteristic of "openness" in a student. The other half were judged to be characteristic of "closedness." This Ideal Student Description Q-Sort (ISD) reveals the extent to which a teacher perceives his/her pupils as either flexible (positive) or rigid (negative) in their interpersonal relations. As a projective technique, the score also suggests whether the teacher is more closed or open in his/her perceptions of students. The bias of the investigator is obvious in assigning a positive rating to openness; however, this should not influence the statistical treatment of the data.

Candidates for admission to the teacher education program at a small liberal arts college were administered the ISD Q-Sort upon initial acceptance into the teacher education program (prior to student teaching), after the student teaching experience, and again after one year of full-time

teaching. There were 81 secondary education candidates (all majoring in academic subjects which they would teach) and 68 elementary education candidates who participated in this study.

Results: A significant difference (Chi Square .01 level of confidence) was found to exist between the change in perceptions of secondary and elementary education students from the time they entered the teacher education program to the completion of one year of full-time teaching experience, a period of approximately three to four years. Table I shows a difference in perceptions of pupils by the two groups entering the teacher education program simultaneously. The elementary education students seem to have more positive perceptions of pupils than do secondary education students. After student teaching the elementary group became even more positive and the secondary group became less positive in their perceptions.

After one year of teaching experience the secondary group became less positive and the elementary group increased in their positive perceptions. The changes within the secondary group are not significant; however, there was significant gain toward positive perceptions by the elementary group. A significant net change between the means of the two groups demonstrates that the two groups became increasingly variant in their perceptions of students.

TABLE I

A comparison of mean Q-Sort scores of elementary and secondary teacher education students from entry into the teacher education program to completion of one year of teaching experience.

	Entry Score	Post-Student Teaching score	Score after one year experience	Net Mean Change
Secondary $\bar{M}$	+8	+6	+3	decrease 5 points
Elementary $\bar{M}$	+15	+19	+23	increase 8 points*
$\bar{M}$ difference	7	13	20	increase 13 points**

*Significant at .05 level of confidence
**Significant at .01 level of confidence

The elementary and secondary groups were examined separately in order to analyze certain factors which may have contributed to these changes in perceptions. The scores were grouped in the following manner: 1.) those students teaching in their major subject area during their first year of teaching; 2.) students' ratings of their training at the undergraduate level; and 3.) grades earned in student teaching. It is presumed that these factors may affect a candidate's perceptions of himself and thereby affect his interpersonal relationships with students.

Elementary education majors who taught in the same grade during student teaching and full time teaching had slightly more positive changes in perceptions than those who taught on a different grade level during their first year of teaching. Teacher education students who did not teach immediately after graduation showed a significant increase in positive perceptions of students (Table II-A).

Students who made grade "B" or above in student teaching showed significant changes in perceptions in a positive direction, while the group making "C" showed significant change in a negative direction (Table II-B).

There is also a significant difference between students who rated their education program "superior" and those who rated their program "good" or "poor." Those rating the program excellent showed a mean positive change of 30 points (Table II-C). A review of the individual scores reveals that this extreme change was due in part to several extremely high post scores; however, each student in this category indicated positive change of no less than 2 points.

The interrelationship of grades earned in student teaching, grade level taught, and rating of the program was not analyzed in this study; however, it does seem that elementary teachers' perceptions of pupils may be directly related to the grade

TABLE II-A

Changes in mean Q-Sort scores among majors in Elementary Education shown in relation to type of teaching experience. N = 68

	Taught same grade in Student Teaching and initial year	Taught different grade in Student Teaching and initial year	Not Teaching
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores Upon Entering Teacher Education Program	+16	+15	+17
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores after initial year of full-time teaching	+24	+17	+41
Difference between the means	8* (increase)	2 (increase)	24* (increase)

* Significant at .05 level

TABLE II-B

Changes in mean Q-Sort scores among majors in Elementary Education shown in relation to performance in student teaching. N = 68

	Student Teaching Grade			
	A	AB	B	C
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores Upon Entering Teacher Education Program	+17	+26	+24	+42
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores after initial year of full-time teaching	+28	+22	+34	-28
Difference between the means	11* (increase)	3 (inc)	10* (inc)	14* (dec.)

* Significant at .01 level

TABLE II-C

Changes in mean Q-Sort scores among majors in Elementary Education shown in relation to rating of Teacher Education Program. N = 68

	Rating of Teacher Education Program by students.		
	Superior	Good	Poor
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores Upon Entering Teacher Education Program	+14	+15	+20
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores after initial year of full time teaching	+44	+13	+30
Difference between the means	30* (inc.)	2 (dec.)	10* (inc.)

* Significant at .01 level

level taught, degree of success in the student teaching program, and perceptions of their teacher education program.

The only significant relationship found to exist between certain experiences of secondary education candidates and changes in their perceptions was among those who rated their teacher education program "good" and earned a "B" in student teaching. Each group became more negative in their perceptions after teaching one year. Tables III-A, III-B, and III-C show the changes in mean Q-Sort scores for the secondary group.

Perceptions of secondary education candidates seem more resistant to change than those of elementary education majors. The direction of change for the secondary group was to become less positive while the elementary group became more positive.

Discussion:

There are two important differences between the secondary and elementary teacher education candidates at the institution studied, which may explain in part the differences in perceptions:

1. Elementary education candidates declare a major in elementary education and concentrate on courses which are oriented toward relating subject matter to children. On the other hand, the secondary candidates begin their college

TABLE III-A

Changes in mean Q-Sort scores among Secondary Education Candidates shown in relation to type of teaching experience. N = 81

	Taught in major field	Taught different subject from major	Not Teaching
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores Upon Entering Teacher Education Program	+2	-1	+16
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores after initial year of full-time teaching	C	-4	+18
Difference between the means	-2	-3	+2

TABLE III-B

Changes in mean Q-Sort scores among Secondary Education Candidates shown in relation to performance in student teaching. N = 81

	Student Teaching Grade			
	A	AB	B	C
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores Upon Entering Teacher Education Program	+12	+1	0	-20
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores after initial year of full-time teaching	+11	0	-8	-15
Difference between the means	-1	-1	-8*	+5

* Significant at .05 level

TABLE III-C

Changes in mean Q-Sort scores among Secondary Education Candidates shown in relation to rating of Teacher Education Program. N = 81

	Rating of Teacher Education Program by students.		
	Superior	Good	Poor
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores Upon Entering Teacher Education Program	0	+10	-4
$\bar{M}$ Q-Sort Scores after initial year of full time teaching	+3	+2	-5
Difference between the means	+3	-8*	-1

* Significant at .05 level

careers majoring in an academic area thereafter concentrating on the selected major with teacher education remaining in the background. One result of this arrangement is that elementary candidates often apply for admission to the teacher education program as early as the end of the freshman year, while most of the secondary candidates wait until their junior year to seek admission. Many secondary candidates actually "drift" into the teacher education program thereby having to extend their college work an extra term in order to complete all requirements.

Prior to student teaching, elementary education candidates participate in more activities involving children and the kinds of pupils they would eventually teach than the secondary group. These laboratory experiences perhaps contribute positively to the validation of candidates' perceptions.

In one pilot group used to test the reliability of the ISD Q-Sort, twelve secondary candidates were given the Q-Sort within a ten-day period immediately preceding their enrolling in their first education course. This first encounter was a course in Materials and Methods of High School Teaching in which the instructor agreed to help the students initiate and develop laboratory experiences in local schools. Table IV indicates the full range of Q-Sort scores as an example of the

manner in which the perceptions of secondary students remained stable over a long period of time. There were significant changes among some individuals as a result of the laboratory experiences, however.

TABLE IV

Changes in Q-Sort scores of secondary education candidates in the pilot study

Student	1st Adm.	10-day Interval	After Lab. Experience	Post-stud. teaching	After 1 year exp.
S1	+10	+10	+10	+8	+6
S2	-6	-8	-32	-24	-20
S3	+6	N.S.*	+6	+8	+8
S4	+10	+10	+12	+8	+8
S5	-12	-12	+6	-6	-12
S6	+10	+12	+14	+12	+12
S7	+8	+6	+20	+14	+8
S8	+12	+8	+28	+8	+8
S9	+22	+24	+26	+24	+20
S10	+6	+6	+2	+2	0
S11	+10	+12	0	+8	0
S12	-2	-2	+12	+2	-4

*no score

The elementary education candidates were not as amenable to change, as a result of a single experience, as were the secondary group. Their scores showed more gradual change over a longer period of time and were usually resistant to deviation. Two student scores showed a complete reversal after one year of teaching (one from --30 to +38 and the other from +20 to -22). The investigator interviewed each candidate to determine if perhaps the instructions were misinterpreted. One candidate revealed that she had experienced severe depression during her first year of teaching which required psychiatric treatment. This perhaps accounted for increased negative perception of self. The other candidate felt that her extreme hostility toward the college during her sophomore year probably accounted for her low initial negative scores.

Implications for Teacher Education Programs:

This study was conducted in an attempt to develop a projective technique (ISD Q-Sort) that could be helpful in predicting success in the teacher education program at a small liberal arts college. As the study progressed, it became apparent that measuring characteristics of students for screening purposes at a definite point in time is contrary to the concept of developmental teaching and learning, especially those perceptions which manifest themselves at the beginning

of a possible career in teaching. Teaching allows for the changing of perceptions, that is placing students in situations so that their experiences provide an opportunity for perceptual change to take place.

There is significant evidence in this study to indicate that the perceptions of teacher education candidates can be changed over a long period of time if provided with a certain sequence of activities. These activities should be closely related to the characteristics of students the candidate may teach after graduation. There is also evidence to support the claim that elementary and secondary candidates enter teacher education with different perceptions of students; therefore, the program of instruction for each group must be considerably different. While it cannot be implied that secondary candidates' perceptions would have become more positive had their undergraduate experiences been oriented more toward the students they would teach, there is some evidence that temporary change did take place over a short period of time due to the laboratory experiences.

There is considerable evidence to support the premise that teacher education students' experiences affect their perceptions of students whom they teach and in turn these perceptions affect the performance of teachers in training. The elementary teacher candidate who has confidence in the

teacher education program and who is guided into experiences which are rewarding tend to increase their positive regard of students. There is some indication that this would be true also of secondary teaching candidates; however, they were more resistant to change of perceptions that the elementary candidates.

One interesting observation is that candidates for teaching who do not teach develop a significantly more positive regard for students than those who go directly into teaching after graduation. This finding may imply that some serious discrepancies between teaching training experiences and first year teaching experiences may exist.

The teacher education program should be examined carefully in order to determine the kinds of perceptions of pupils candidates should develop during their experiences while in the program. A candidate with an extreme negative score on the ISD Q-Sort may not be automatically disqualified. Instead, an adviser could plan experiences with children and youth so the candidate may have an opportunity to change perceptions. The fundamental growth and development course sequence should be oriented toward helping the candidate to develop more positive perceptions of students and himself. Also, the instructors in the teacher education program must be open, flexible, and project a helpful attitude if a climate of perceptual change is to exist.

The I.S.D. Q-Sort, instead of becoming a screening device, may evolve into a counseling instrument. It may be used in planning the sequence of interpersonal relationships in teacher education according to the candidates' individual needs. Further study is needed in order to determine which specific experiences would contribute most effectively to the perceptual changes in teacher education candidates.

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